



# Drought Policy Alignment

## Background

Drought is the most harmful natural hazard. Across all regions, its impacts affect the highest number of people and span across all sectors, with devastating consequences on human beings, the environment, and economies. Drought is a “silent” phenomenon, a slowly-onsetting disaster spreading over time and beyond national boundaries, whose development and long-term outcomes are highly unpredictable and difficult to anticipate.

Agriculture shoulders a significant portion of the burden, particularly in developing nations where it emerges as the most vulnerable sector. In these contexts, rural livelihoods absorb as much as 80 percent of the direct consequences of drought, with negative effects, among others, in terms of water accessibility, land suitability, crop production, and food security. On a global scale, with over 40 percent of the total population depending on agriculture for a living, it is estimated that drought jeopardizes the well-being of over 1.3 billion individuals.

Several renowned scientific bodies confirm the undeniable and unparalleled climate hazards, including drought, that the planet is currently confronting and will continue to face in the forthcoming decades. The intensity, frequency, and duration of drought events are increasing, while their geographical scope is likely to expand to different regions. Countries need to focus on preparedness to enhance their resilience through proactive approaches and avoid drought leading to famine. Mitigating drought risks is imperative to avoid setbacks on the development trajectory and irreversible impacts on ecosystems.



## Approach

As part of the Drought Initiative established by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), FAO embarked on a comprehensive programme to tackle the multiple dimensions of drought and support countries' preparedness. The programme responds to the Organization's Strategic Framework and reflects on the Programme Priority Area for "Better Life" and "Resilient agri-food systems" calling for implementing measures to reduce vulnerability to socioeconomic and environmental stresses. The "Enabling Activities for Implementing UNCCD COP Drought Decisions" project, funded by the Global Environmental Facility and implemented in collaboration with UNCCD, the World Meteorological Organization, and other partners, recognizes the importance of holistic approaches for integrated drought management and drought risk reduction and aims at enhancing communities' resilience through global multidimensional interventions.



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In the specific, the programme works through four components:

- **Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought** in support of the effective policy and implementation measures for addressing drought under the UNCCD
- **Drought Toolbox** in support of utilizing and upgrading the toolbox for planning and mitigation efforts
- **Capacity-building for the implementation of the national drought plans** in support of the development of national institutional frameworks
- **Drought vulnerability assessment and preparedness for mitigation measures** in support of the national capacities for drought vulnerability assessment, monitoring and reporting

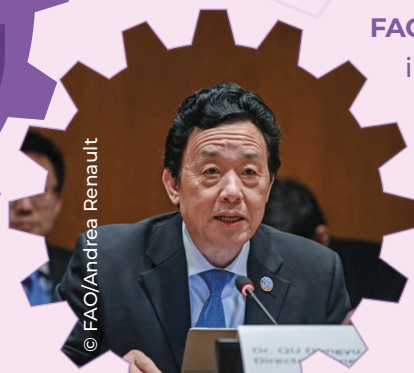
Complementary to knowledge generation and in-country actions, the programme developed different digital tools and capacity-building activities to promote drought preparedness, including:

In the face of intensifying climate impacts, well-funded proactive responses to drought are critical. We must work together to mainstream proactive approaches into national strategies, and foster sustainable financial solutions to secure their implementation

**Qu Dongyu, FAO  
Director-General,  
UN 2023 Water Conference,  
March 2023**

**FAO Drought portal**, a global knowledge-sharing platform to support countries and stakeholders in enhancing drought resilience in agriculture and improving food security;

**FAO Drought Finance Tracker**, an innovative and user-friendly platform for the analysis of international drought finance flow and decision-making.



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## A step-by-step pathway

Timely planning and cross-sectoral thinking are key to enable the transition from post-drought management to preparedness. Aware of this, the thirteen meeting of the Conference of Parties to the UNCCD (COP13) launched the Drought Initiative to roll out a global programme in support of countries for the development of comprehensive National Development Plans (NDP).

The Initiative focused on long-term impacts of drought events hence fostering a paradigm shift towards risk-based and proactive management approaches. The multilevel collaboration between national and international stakeholders within the drought community is fundamental to achieve this result.

Under its first component, the FAO drought programme, aims at enabling countries to fulfill their participation in the Intergovernmental Working Group on “Effective Policy and Implementation Measures for addressing drought under the UNCCD” process and beyond.

The programme adopts a stepwise approach to address the policy dimension of integrated drought management and strengthen strategic drought preparedness at the country and regional levels, in line with the most renowned and innovative adopted approaches.

### Step 1. Multicriteria assessment of national drought plans

In the first step, a review of the plans endorsed and published under the Drought Initiative was conducted. The “A multi-criteria assessment framework for national drought planning” report<sup>1</sup> was developed to drive the review and enable countries to set up iterative processes for ex-ante assessments of the plans. Through the application of a broad set of criteria aligned with the three pillars of the integrated drought management approach, the process allowed a better understanding of the level of readiness of the plans and provided a suite of recommendations for the enhancement of the plans, hence paving the way to a smoother implementation.

### Box 1. Learn more - The pillars of integrated drought management

The three pillars of integrated drought management represent the building blocks of a successful drought policy and have been adopted by the international drought community as a reference drought management approach. Those pillars are:

- **Monitoring and early warning systems** to track, assess and deliver relevant information concerning climatic, hydrologic and water supply conditions and trends
- **Vulnerability and impact assessment** to assess potential drought threats and evaluate socio-economic and institutional vulnerabilities
- **Response and mitigation** to determine appropriate mitigation and response actions aimed at risk reduction and enhanced drought resilience



Review of references



Definition of criteria and weight scheme



Preparation of calculation scheme



Review and assessment of validated national drought plans



Elaboration of recommendations based on national drought plans



Support the implementation

<sup>1</sup> Alkadir, M.A., Pek, E. and Salman, M. 2022. A multi-criteria assessment framework for national drought planning. Rome, FAO. <https://www.fao.org/3/cc1276en/cc1276en.pdf>

## Step 2. Guidance for policy alignment







Drought, exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, poses a significant threat to countries' socio-economic development, environmental sustainability, and overall resilience. To effectively address this challenge, national drought plans must be aligned with national regulatory frameworks, policies, and strategies directly and indirectly related to drought mitigation and climate change adaptation. The objective of the policy alignment exercise is to provide a roadmap for harmonizing the national drought plans with national policy setting and institutional contexts, thus enabling the most effective coordination for their implementation. The alignment of plans with the national policy and institutional settings is essential to enhance countries' drought resilience across any affected, or potentially affected, sector.

### Box 2. Focus on - A methodology for policy alignment







To inform the alignment process effectively, a comprehensive situational analysis of selected country cases was conducted. The analysis considered the unique features of individual states, including climate, geography, and socio-economic background. The information derived from national plans, the findings of the multicriteria assessment, and extensive desk research form the basis of this analysis.

A policy and institutional gap analysis was employed as a crucial step in the alignment process, serving multiple purposes: to identify drought-vulnerable sectors, to identify priority intervention areas; to assess relevance and priorities, to gauge the significance of policy alignment in each identified sector; to acknowledge the interconnection between climate change and drought risk, to emphasize synergies between climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies and integrated drought management approaches.

#### Objectives

-  Better coordination amongst institutes
-  Involved and activated stakeholders from all sectors
-  Joint and leveraged resources
-  Diverse communication channel
-  Learning on cause-effect relationships
-  Rapid detection of risk

#### Results

-  Well defined responsibilities and roles
-  Increased inclusivity and ownership
-  Higher resource efficiency and facilitated knowledge transfer
-  Facilitated and inclusive flow of information
-  More accurate prediction of foreseen impacts
-  Improved effectiveness and timing of anticipatory actions

**Effective implementation of national drought plans**

## Step 3. Case studies for peer-to-peer learning

The following step towards the elaboration of guidelines for the policy alignment of drought planning, is the analysis of selected case studies, covering worldwide regions, and the illustration of weaknesses and strengths. The review of the national drought plans in the policy environment contexts resulted in varying levels of recognition of drought. In some cases, relevant national policies are complemented with legal instruments to ensure the timely implementation of drought-related actions. Such legal instruments were found in different sectors' regulatory frameworks, including land or forest acts. In other cases, the drought plan and policies are entirely embedded into the umbrella framework of disaster risk management. Also, other cases, including countries in arid contexts, adopted drought management as part of the environmental or water management-related national frameworks. The best-fitting modalities for policy alignment are always context-specific, whereas the decision to insert drought management into the national regulatory framework depends on multiple factors, such as the surrounding institutional setting, the scale of drought impacts, the available mitigation actions, the most affected sectors, and the flexibility of existing policies. For this purpose, national consultations are organized globally in support of the policy alignment.

Find  out more



FAO Drought Portal

<https://www.fao.org/in-action/drought-portal/en>

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